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ABSTRACT

The generation of categories of instructional leadership descriptors and the identification of past influences and current resources is the purpose of this study. Data for the first research purpose were gathered through application of Flannigan's (1954) critical incident and functional description techniques to responses of experts on instructional leadership. Data collection for the second and third purposes was through semistructured interviews with selected secondary nominated key informant principals. Data analysis of the first three phases was followed by a second conference with the principals to record case studies and to categorize past and current leadership sources. Five categories of instructional leadership and a triangularized research design were developed. Findings indicate that public school administrators were the major influence on developing instructional leaders. Other conclusions point to the importance of principals' interaction and communication with different groups and other principals, and their reliance upon professional journals as current information sources. Figures illustrate instructional leadership spheres of triangularization and different leadership styles. (24 references) (LMI)

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Secondary School Principals as Instructional Leaders:
Their Past Influences and Current Sources for
Instructional Leadership Advice and Information

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The school principal is the subject of renewed attention. Although studies concerning the principal are not new to education, much current research has a different purpose. Past research projects were primarily demographic in nature and dealt with factors such as age, gender, race, physical size, teaching experience, and administrative style (DeBevoise, 1984; Newman & Behar, 1982). Recent studies have been more directed in examining the principal as instructional leader (Anderson, 1987; Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Duckworth, 1981; Glatthorn & Newberg, 1984; Russell, Mazzarella, White, & Maurer, 1985).

The majority of instructional leadership research has been conducted at the elementary school level and has concentrated upon the products or effects of successful instructional leadership (Greenfield, 1982). Researchers sought to document effective instructional leadership results and reported their findings in terms of basic skills acquisition, achievement test scores, and order/discipline (Austin, 1979; Coulson, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Shoemaker & Fraser, 1981; Wynn, 1981). The intent of this research study sought a different perspective: investigating the process of instructional leadership within the role of secondary principal, and focusing upon secondary principals themselves as effective instructional leaders rather than what ensues from or is produced by that leadership.

Several questions guided the study. What are the characteristics of an instructional leader? What sources, past and present, have assisted principals to develop as instructional leaders? Who or what

provided the major influences? What factors currently affect principals in their instructional leadership roles? Who do principals seek out for instructional leadership advice and information? If the principals' instructional leadership is one of the keys to school success (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1978, Greenfield, 1982; Sapone, 1983; Weber, 1971), then the sources that influenced and continue to affect that leadership emerge as important research issues.

The purpose of the study was three-fold: (a) to generate categories of instructional leadership descriptors, (b) to identify the sources that previously influenced selected secondary principals as they were emerging into instructional leaders, and (c) to determine what sources principals currently seek out for instructional leadership advice and information.

Data for the study's first purpose, the instructional leadership descriptors, were gathered by using Flanagan's (1954) critical incident and functional description techniques with 15 nationwide instructional leadership authorities. Authorities were identified and selected because of their extensive research and publication in the area of instructional leadership. Second- and third-purpose data, previous influences and current instructional leadership sources, were obtained through semi-structured interviews with two groups of subjects: selected secondary principals and nominated key informant principals (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Tremblay, 1982).

First round interviews were conducted with selected principals in northeastern Ohio whose schools had been awarded nationally through

the U.S. Department of Education's "Secondary School Recognition Program" (1983). An underlying assumption in the subject selection process was that effective schools have principals who are effective instructional leaders. Effective schools were identified as those having been screened, reviewed, and nationally awarded. Four secondary schools in northeastern Ohio had, at the time of the study, received that acclaim. Additional instructional leadership information was gleaned from visits to the nationally recognized schools, classroom observations, and conferences with school personnel. During the first round of interviews, each selected principal nominated another secondary principal believed to be an exemplary instructional leader. The second series of interviews involved those nominated key informant principals.

After the data gathered from the study's three phases had been analyzed and categorized, a second conference was scheduled with the principals to share the findings and to elicit their reactions. Vignette-like case studies for both groups of principals were then written and tables of instructional leadership sources and previous influences compiled.

The study's design provided a framework within which research-based and practitioner-generated data could be compared collectively. Several within-method triangulation procedures (Jick, 1983) were incorporated into the design to enhance the study's internal reliability (see Figure 1). These strategies included data comparisons across groups of subjects, outside auditors (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) who reviewed the collected data and analysis results,

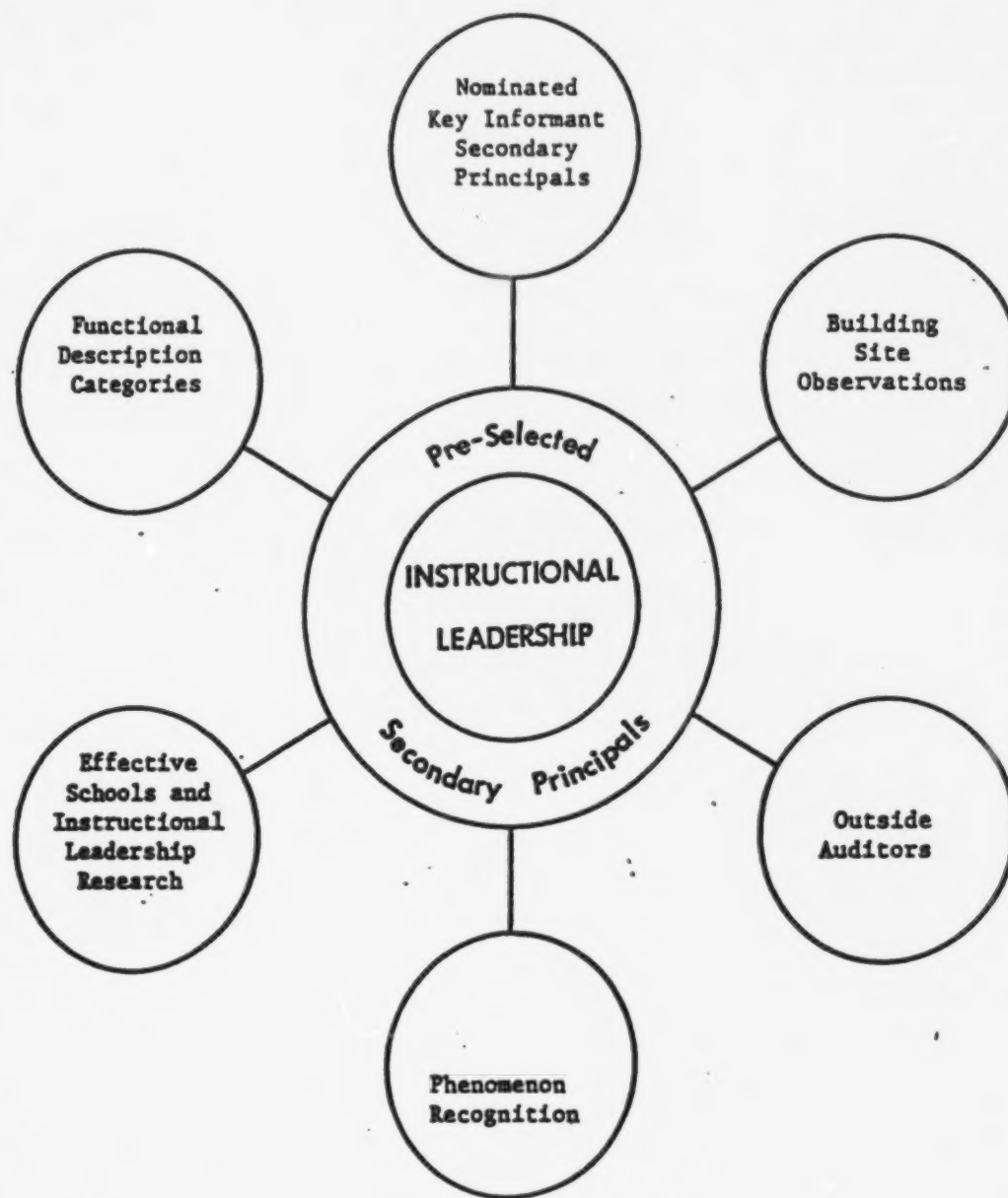


Figure 1: Instructional Leadership Spheres of Triangulation

school visitations, and phenomena recognition (Tremblay, 1982), a process by which the researcher shares results and interpretations with the subjects to validate accuracy.

Five categories of instructional leadership, developed from the 15 authorities' descriptions, became the basis of comparison for data received during the principal interviews. The authorities responded, in rank order, that effective instructional leadership involves the principal: (a) possessing a substantial knowledge base in curriculum, instruction, and evaluation; (b) providing vision and direction for the school; (c) promoting positive teaching and learning environments; (d) establishing patterns of effective communication and motivation; and (e) maintaining high expectations for self, staff, and students. A correlation of 78% existed between the principals' and the authorities' instructional leadership descriptors. During the interviews, however, other dimensions of instructional leadership emerged, dimensions not found in the authorities' descriptions (see Table 1). Each principal had something new to add to the concept: each brought out a personal, practice-based instructional leadership component.

Public school administrators provided the major influence on the secondary principals as they were emerging into instructional leaders. Graduate-level administrative programs, coursework, or professors were not identified by the principals as being an influence. The identification of school administrators as being the major influence on developing instructional leaders has significant impact for current administrators and graduate departments of educational administration.

TABLE 1

Specific Secondary School Principal Instructional Leadership
 Characteristics Dissimilar from the Authorities' Descriptors

Principal	Dissimilar Characteristic
#1	Link up to a nationwide network of practicing administrators and educational authorities.
#2	Adapt administrative style to the unique characteristics and demands of the community.
#3	Conduct research into current literature to attain specific information and solutions for school issues.
#4	Match the right person with the right responsibility.
#5	Understand each subject well enough to talk the teacher's language.
#6	Model instruction for staff members by demonstrating specific strategies in classroom situations.
#7	Search out the area's best models of teaching and arrange for teachers to visit and observe those classrooms.
#8	Facilitate and allow others to take the initiative.

Practicing administrators must realize the extent of their influence, the effects of their role modeling, and the lasting impression of their actions and advice. The key to their influence rests with its practical usefulness: the ability to relate to real and everyday situations.

Departments of educational administration should be a major source of instructional leadership influence and information. For the principals in this study, they were not. Perhaps by incorporating current instructional leadership research and practice into their curricula and by involving exemplary administrative practitioners directly with course development and instruction, departments of educational administration will increase in prestige and influence.

Secondary principals seek out instructional leadership advice and information at four levels. Building-level administrative assistants and teachers are sources for specific and subject-related expertise. Secondary principals have the most confidence in individuals closest to them. Central office personnel, primarily the superintendent and curriculum director, are consulted primarily for general, procedural-type information and advice. Other principals emerged as the third important source. Secondary principals communicate with one another to exchange and reflect upon common ideas, activities, and concerns. Education journals, the fourth source, keep the secondary principal abreast of current research and practice. Journals were identified as being useful resources for contemporary research and practice and for current instructional and curricular patterns.

Four major themes emerged from the study. First, effective instructional leaders are people oriented and interactional. They do not allow themselves to become secluded in their offices and isolated from the mainstream of daily school life. They interact regularly with their various school populations and, by doing so, remain visible and accessible.

Second, effective instructional leaders communicate and function within a network of other principals. The principal network theme was woven throughout both series of interviews: principals keeping in close contact with one another on a frequent basis. The network of principal colleagues appears to operate on both a formal and informal basis and has no geographic boundaries. Numerous references were made to networks on local, state, and nationwide levels.

Field-based administrative practitioners as the major influence on prospective and developing secondary principals emerged as a third theme. The praise and accolades the secondary principals expressed for their mentors were often the most poignant and retrospective aspect of the interview. The eight secondary principals in this study have the opportunity to influence members of the next generation of instructional leaders as they, too, pass on their expertise. The vision of that perpetual cycle is an optimistic outgrowth of this research.

The final theme involves the principals' reliance upon professional journals to remain informed about current educational issues. Several principals cited specific journals as being important sources. The pattern for these principals was a preference for

publications that are school and practitioner oriented. Journals from the various administrative professional associations were referred to more often than were publications primarily research and theory based in nature.

Eliot Eisner (1986) emphasizes that research is to strengthen the bond between theory and practice. Research conducted in clinical, non-school settings is often viewed skeptically by school practitioners. It is perceived to be impractical and unrelated to their everyday lives. This study alleviated that condition by placing the researcher within the arena of study in order to interact with secondary principals and to observe school populations within their natural environments. The intent was to capture the essence of secondary principal as instructional leader in a dynamic and lifelike manner. Excerpts from three of the eight case studies reflect this goal and the quintessence of effective instructional leadership.

Case Study #3: My job as principal is, I think, to be certain we do not stay on the same spot. That is not to imply that we all have to get on a different bandwagon every week, but we sure need to look at every bandwagon that goes by. Sometimes the instruments on it are worth playing, and if we need to play them, I want to be certain we understand how.

Case Study #6: I pride myself as being an instructional leader who actually models instruction. I teach a different class each semester and invite teachers to observe me. If I have a teacher who really does not understand a specific teaching strategy, I'll say that on such and such a day I am starting a new unit - come and watch while

I model it. They can come into my classroom to do that. Then I will ask them to go back to their classrooms and practice it, and I'll come in and observe them.

Case Study #7: I am flattered when teachers much more experienced in instruction than I seek me out for advice. I know that, as their instructional leader, I must provide for their needs or they will stop coming. If teachers come to me with instructional questions, I have to give them something to curb their appetites or they'll go someplace else to nibble. I want them to nibble here.

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